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DE RUEHEK #0677/01 1751134
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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2376
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3141
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1428
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3476
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2862
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000677

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT TARGETS FOREIGN MISSIONARIES

REF: A. BISHKEK 43

[1](#)B. BISHKEK 675

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Classified By: Classified by Charge d'Affaires Lee Litzenberger, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As the Kyrgyz government begins to implement the new religious organizations law (reftels), foreign missionaries have faced increasing difficulties, including deportations and the denial of essential documentation. At last count, three foreigners were asked to leave the country, two were refused religious licenses, and four were denied visa extensions. The Kyrgyz Security Services (GKNB) was the common denominator for all of these cases and, while not explicitly authorized in the new law on religious organizations, seemed to play a pivotal role in the evaluation of missionaries' activities. Religious groups expressed their disappointment in the downward spiral of freedom of religion in the once-tolerant Kyrgyz Republic and fear the situation will soon rival that of Kyrgyzstan's more oppressive neighbors. End Summary.

Deportations Commence

[1](#)2. (C) The Kyrgyz government, in an apparent attempt to disrupt the activities of Evangelical Christian groups, canceled the visas of at least three foreigners and forced them to leave within ten days. On May 13, after speaking about the current political and economic situation in Kyrgyzstan during services at the Assemblies of God Church, Darren Lawson, the Australian director of Hope Academy, an English-speaking faith-based school in Bishkek, was deported. GKNB officers confronted Lawson about his speech, asserting that his comments during a religious ceremony were inappropriate. Within days of the Lawson deportation, Kyrgyz authorities canceled the visa of Aaron Pilon, the Canadian pastor of the Assemblies of God Church, and gave him ten days to leave the country. Pilon said that the reason given to him by the GKNB was related to administrative errors made by his church and not as a direct result of his personal

activities. However, Pilon speculated that his visa cancellation was connected to government displeasure over Lawson's speech during the church service.

13. (C) During a meeting with Poloff on May 15, South Korean Baptist pastors stated that their colleague received a similar notice from the GKNB to depart the country. According to the pastors, the South Korean missionary and pastor at the Christ's Church in Kant met with the GKNB to discuss his parish and verify the church's registration paperwork. Local authorities later informed the missionary that he had to leave the country by the end of May, providing the vague justification that his activities violated the regulations associated with his religious visa.

LICENSES REVOKED

14. (C) As an alternative to actual deportation, the Kyrgyz authorities refused to renew the official religious registration, or "licenses," of some foreign missionaries, preventing them from preaching or conducting any other activities on behalf of their religious organizations. On May 29, Pastor Daniel Danis of the International Church notified Poloff that the GKNB had refused to renew his religious license to conduct religious activity. Danis, a Romanian citizen, pressed for an explanation, but the GKNB officer merely shifted blame to the State Agency for Religious Affairs. Danis also stated that an American recently arrived to replace him for the summer holidays but was also denied a religious license, rendering his trip to Bishkek useless.

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VISA EXTENSIONS DENIED

15. (C) Kyrgyz authorities are apparently trying to reduce the number of foreign missionaries operating in the country by restricting visas. South Korean Pastor David Chang of the Salang Church was denied a renewal of his religious visa, obliging him to leave the country when it expired on June 9. Matthew Kelly of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow informed Poloff that an American citizen couple, who had been waiting for months for a visa renewal, received notification that they would receive a final one-month visa, with no possibility of extension. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) told the couple that decisions on religious visas were made by the GKNB and that the Foreign Ministry had no influence on their decisions.

16. (C) Additionally, religious organizations complained of waiting for months to receive religious visas, blaming the MFA for bringing the application process to a grinding halt. Bishop Messmer of the Catholic Church expressed his anger that his colleagues, three Polish nuns and one Slovakian priest, were obliged to make weekly trips to the MFA to check on the status of their visa process, which has dragged on for over two months already. Bishop Eichholz of the Evangelical Lutheran Church voiced similar complaints to Poloff, noting that his wife, a German citizen, was among the missionaries waiting for a visa. Both Bishops, who are citizens of Kyrgyzstan and long-time religious leaders in Bishkek, noted a significant downturn in the protection of religious freedom and dramatic shift in the country's policies towards religious organizations. Bishop Eichholz told Poloff that he used to brag about the state of religious tolerance in Kyrgyzstan to his Central Asian colleagues. They both expressed concern that Kyrgyzstan was on its way towards joining the ranks of more oppressive states.

17. (C) Interestingly, the new law on religious organizations (ref A), provides that foreign missionaries may remain in Kyrgyzstan for no more than three years (although the law is not clear whether the three-year clock will start with the

adoption of the law or will be applied retroactively).
However, in the cases we are aware of, this provision of the
law was not cited as a reason for denying visa extensions.

COMMENT

18. (C) The concerns expressed by local religious leaders
highlight the increasing restriction of religious activity
and the greater role of the state security service in
determining which groups should be allowed to operate. If
this is an indicator of the increased restriction as a result
of the religious organizations law, then most religious
groups, but especially representatives of Protestant and
other "non-traditional" Christian churches should anticipate
an uphill battle once the law is fully implemented.

LITZENBERGER